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Bern Embassy Is Busy School For Red China

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The Washington Post Foreign Service

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GENEVA, Jan. 25—Communist China has transformed its embassy in Bern into its biggest school abroad for training diplomats for future assignments.

Although espionage and undercover activity may be part of the function, authorities here say that the main purpose of the school is to instruct young Chinese in how to behave in contacts with the outside world after years of isolation.

This indicates Chinese expectations of a wave of new diplomatic exchanges following the formal recognition by France scheduled to take place momentarily. African nations belonging to the French community are said to be planning to follow suit.

Apart from Switzerland, Britain, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries, no other Western European nations now recognize the Peking government. But Portugal now is reported to be conferring with Communist China and further exchanges may be stimulated by French recognition.

May Stop in Switzerland

For several days a rumor has been current that Chinese Prime Minister Chou En-lai and Foreign Minister Chen Yi, now in Africa, plan to stop in Switzerland in connection with a trip to Paris. As of this writing, the Swiss government reportedly has no more information about such a visit than American authorities here.

But if the Swiss government is in the dark on this point, it nevertheless keeps very close watch on the 200 to 300 Chinese Communist officials known to be in the country.

Authorities indignantly reject the notion that the Peking regime could be using Switzerland as a base for the types of activities combated by secret agent James Bond in Ian Fleming's fiction thrillers. They know of no Dr. No in Switzerland.

For one thing, they say, laws designed to protect Swiss neutrality are very strict about foreign secret intelligence operations.

According to one expert, the kind of activity conducted during World War II by Allen Dulles (wartime chief of the American Office of Strategic Services in Switzerland and later director of Central Intelligence) would not be permitted today.

Circumspect in Movements

For another thing, the Chinese have been very circumspect in their movements, which are promptly known to the Swiss. Although their missions in Bern and Geneva are large by Swiss standards, they are not so large as either the American or Soviet contingents.

Authorities consider it possible that some of the initial contacts between France and China took place in Bern. But the main ground work for recognition was laid by former French Premier Edgar Faure on a trip to Peking last fall.

Overt Chinese extracurricular activities have consisted principally of keeping contact with student groups in Switzerland. Chinese representatives occasionally attempt to influence young people by attending student meetings.

A monthly magazine published in Vevey, Revolution, follows the Chinese line. Its nominal proprietor is a Swiss Communist who defected from the Parti Ouvrier Populair, the Swiss Communist Party which is aligned with Moscow. Presumably it is Chinese-financed.

Purchase Report Ridiculed

Reports that the Chinese Communists have become the largest landowners in Geneva, however, are ridiculed by the Swiss. Authorities point out that new laws make it very difficult for foreigners to acquire property in Switzerland.

The Chinese Communists are known to own two villas on opposite sides of Lake Leman near Geneva, one at Versoix and the other at Vesenaz, in addition to their consulate here. These were purchased in part to escape high local rents.

But the possibility that the Chinese have substantial bank accounts in Switzerland is not excluded. In justifying French recognition, a spokesman in Paris asked the other day: "How can we ignore a country that has interests reaching from the jungles of Zanzibar to the banking world of Switzerland?"

Soon After Takeover

Switzerland recognized the new government of China shortly after the Communist takeover in 1949 and enjoys outwardly friendly relations. It also keeps a consulate on Taiwan, and the Chinese Nationalist government has a permanent mission to the United Nations in Geneva.

Swiss trade with China has been in the doldrums for several years. For 18 months before 1959 Communist China was the largest purchaser of Swiss watches after the United States. But when the great leap forward tripped up, these sales fell to zero.

Last summer, the Chinese Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade visited Switzerland. He told Swiss officials that China had experienced very hard times for three years but was over the worst and again wanted to buy from Switzerland what she could pay for.

All transactions are in cash for hard currency, and the Chinese are known as good payers. No question of credits has arisen.

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